

Oakland University  
College of Arts and Sciences  
Religious Studies  
**REL 1850 World Religious Traditions**  
4 Credits  
Fall 2018

Professor: Joshua Fleer  
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Class Time: online

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**Course (Catalog) Description:**

Examines the core teachings and practices of the world's major religious traditions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese religions. Emphasis is on terminology developed within each tradition, identification of human problems that each attempts to solve, and the insights and problematic issues that arise from these attempts. Satisfies the university general education requirement in the global perspective knowledge exploration area. (Formerly REL 150)

**This class satisfies the General Education requirements in the Global Perspective Knowledge Exploration area.**

**Course Prerequisites/corequisites:** none

**Global Perspective Learning Outcomes:**

The student will demonstrate:

- 1) knowledge of the environments, political systems, economies, societies and religions of one or more regions outside the United States and awareness of the transnational flow of goods, peoples, ideas and values
- 2) knowledge of the role that different cultural heritages, past and present, play in forming values in another part of the world, enabling the student to function within a more global context

### **Course Objectives:**

- 1) Characterize and exhibit the nature of religious studies as an academic discipline.
- 2) Demonstrate detailed knowledge and understanding in selected content areas of religious studies including the following:
  - a. The assessment and critique of ideas about a “core” essence locatable in major religious traditions;
  - b. Broad understanding and critique of the history and expression of those ideas expressed within discourse about religious communities;
  - c. Personal, professional, ethical, and societal implications of the ways that “common” ideas and practices shape contemporary social discourse.

### **Cross-Cutting Capacities:**

- 1) Social Awareness—This course raises the awareness of fundamental issues related to religion encountered in a global world and provides resources for the assumption of the role of the critically aware citizen through gaining increased knowledge of religious and spiritual people and groups as they act in, and are acted upon, the culture they inhabit.
- 2) Critical Thinking—This course examines religious beliefs and practices from the standpoint of critical analysis rather than a faith perspective, and encourages the formation of critical judgment on the part of the student. It explores religious language, thought, and practice and the meaning attributed to them.

### **Required Text and Supporting Course Material:**

Text: Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One*;

Film: *Sanjay’s Super Team*

The required book for this course may be purchased at the OU campus Barnes & Noble, at the Textbook Outlet on Squirrel Road, or online. The required film for this course may be borrowed from your local public library, rented from your preferred online streaming service (including, Amazon, iTunes, YouTube, and others), or purchased via your chosen seller. Other required reading, noted on the syllabus, will be available through Moodle.

Required Technology: As a student enrolled in this course, you will need:

- 1) a computer with the most updated versions of your chosen web browser. Use of smartphones and tablets is not recommended.
- 2) a backup computer in the event that your computer crashes or internet goes down. We’ve all been there before; technology can fail. In addition, it is highly recommended that you utilize a cloud solution for saving all of your work instead of relying on your hard drive or USB stick. Have a backup plan for your backup plan.

**Expectations of Students:** As a student enrolled in this course, you agree to do the

following:

**1) Participate in virtual class.** It is essential for you to participate in all class assignments. You should expect to log into the class 3 to 5 times per week, or more. Excused absence includes documented illness, deaths in the immediate family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. Accommodations for these excused absences will be made and will be done in a way that does not penalize students who have a valid excuse. If you have advance knowledge of upcoming excusable absences, you should bring them to my attention in advance.

**2) Complete assigned readings, in their entirety, on schedule.** You must complete assigned readings by the start of the class meeting on the date indicated in the syllabus.

**3) Complete all assignments, in a timely manner.** I will excuse late submissions of work and permit incompletes only in distressing cases of death or extreme illness. You must bring such cases to my attention promptly. Late papers and exams will be substantially penalized by 50 points per day.

**4) Contribute to online discussions.** You should prepare for class and participate in lively discussions.

**5) Communication.** As a student enrolled in this course, you are expected to:

a) login to the course 3–5 times per week.

b) anticipate email responses from your professor in 1–2 days, or less.

c) respond to professor emails within 2 days.

d) observe netiquette. For more information on netiquette, please [click here to view netiquette](#)

e) seek technical assistance if issues arise with Moodle by contacting the e-Learning and Instructional Support office at: Phone (248) 805-1625 or their help ticket submission website <http://www2.oakland.edu/elis/help.cfm?lms=2>

**6) Obey the OU Conduct Code.** The Oakland University Academic Conduct Policy outlines the University’s expectations for the integrity of students’ academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the [Academic Conduct Policy](#) and for living up to their pledge to “...practice and uphold standards of academic integrity and honesty. . . . [by] representing oneself and one’s work honestly” (Academic Conduct Policy is available at <http://catalog.oakland.edu/content.php?catoid=11&navoid=483#Other Academic Policies>). Violations of the OU Academic Conduct Policy will result in a student automatically

receiving a failing grade for the course. In addition, I will pursue full administrative consequences against any and all cases of plagiarism and cheating, including any form of collaboration on course quizzes and exams intended to be completed individually.

**7) Ask for help when you need it.** I am always happy to assist students in their attempts to master course materials and successfully complete course assignments. I am available via email, and you can also schedule an office appointment with me on campus. Please contact me if you have questions about readings, lectures, or topics raised in course forum discussions. I also am happy to provide guidance about how to refer to or cite another work in the assignments you complete for this course.

**8) Register with Disability Support Services if you need accommodation.** Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should: (1) register with and provide documentation to Disability Support Services (DSS); and (2) provide a DSS letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week that class meets. This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to OU students with disabilities, contact [Disability Support Services](#), 103A North Foundation Hall, Oakland University, Rochester, MI 48309-4401; phone: (248) 370-3266; fax: (248) 370-4327; TTY: (248) 370-3268; email: [dss@oakland.edu](mailto:dss@oakland.edu); <http://www.oakland.edu/dss>.

**9) Preferred Name Policy.** If you do not identify with the name that is listed with the registrar, you may change their name in MySAIL. Please notify me so that I may appropriately amend my records. In addition, if you prefer to go by a different pronoun, please inform me.

**10) Technical Skills Required.** As a student enrolled in this course, you are expected to have access to a computer with internet access. You should be able to operate your chosen computer and internet server with moderate level proficiency, and troubleshooting basic computer problems. Should you experience problems with Moodle, you may seek assistance from OU's e-Learning and Instructional Support. Click here: [OU's e-Learning and Instructional Support](#).

### **Grade Determination:**

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

Your grade will be calculated according to the following formula:

Reading quizzes	110 points
Course Discussions	175 points
Course Assignments	215 points
Definition of Religion (10 points)	

Revision Assignment (30 points)	
Analyses Assignments (40 points)	
Comic Depictions (90 points)	
Reflective Journals	100 points
Term Paper	200 points
Final Exam	200 points
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TOTAL	1000 points

**1) Weekly preparation quizzes, each worth 10 points, (110 points total).** In order to do well in this course you must keep up with the reading schedule. The preparation component of your grade will be based on your numerical performance on weekly reading quizzes. Starting in week 2, each week will offer you the opportunity to earn 10 points toward your final tally of 110 possible points for preparation.

I give a short quiz on the assigned reading at the start of each week, starting in week 1. These quizzes serve two functions. First, they allow you to demonstrate that you did the assigned reading; second, they highlight central topics to be discussed throughout the week. Each quiz is worth 10 points. Reading quizzes consist of simple short-answer and multiple-choice questions. If you have done the assigned reading you will do well on the quizzes.

**2) Course Discussion Forums, worth 175 points total.** In addition to preparing for each class, you will be expected to participate in and contribute to class discussion based on your critical reading and comprehension of weekly virtual lectures and videos. You will post a reading Reflection to each discussion forum every week (one-to-two per week) by Wednesdays at midnight, and you will post two Responses per Reflection prompt to your colleagues' Reflections by Fridays at midnight. The Reflections and Responses will be posted to course discussion boards on our course Moodle site. Your weekly Reflections, due Wednesdays, will critically engage the reading based on Reflection prompts. Your colleague Responses, due Fridays, will engage your colleagues' posts. Reflections are worth 10 points each, and Responses are worth 2 points each. During the first week of class, you will introduce yourself and respond to your colleagues. This Introduction Forum is worth 5 points total.

**3) Course Assignments, worth 215 points.** Course Assignments have been selected for the purpose of introducing integrative modes of learning and demonstration focused on a variety of learning styles. Course Assignments will include:  
Definition of Religion (10 points). You will submit your definition of religion during week 1. No outside research is required for this definition assignment. You are to write your definition of religion based upon your understanding at the outset of this course.  
Comic Depictions (135 points total). You will depict in comic strip format the weekly topic under consideration in weeks four (4) to thirteen (13) (total of nine weeks). Based on the reading, lectures, and forum discussions each week, you will depict the diverging questions posed by different religious groups in comic strip format. You will visualize the topic under consideration, then depict it in comic strip format. Your visual images should

be created by hand and spatially organized in the layout of a comic strip. Illustrations should be to the best of your ability, but you will not be graded on your artistic ability. You will be assessed on your analytical depiction through the overall “craft” rather than your artistic skill. Think of this assignment as the creation of a miniature model. This assignment is intended to tap into **visual and kinesthetic learning styles**. You will upload your comic each week, worth 15 points each, to the course Moodle site. Selected comics will be made available for class-wide access each week.

Revision Assignment (30 points).

Analyses Assignments (40 points).

**4) Reflective Journals, 50 points each (worth 100 points total).** At two stages throughout the course, you will submit a short 350–500-word reflective journal about your experience in the course in light of the current week. This Journal is your opportunity to engage in a self-reflexive activity. It is a metacognitive exercise, which can be used to reflect on what you discovered that you did not expect, or what you expected to find but did not encounter. You will be able to use the Reflective Journals as opportunities to log your impressions. Your Reflective Journals are due by the end of weeks three (3) and twelve (12).

**5) Term Paper, worth 200 points.** You will select a topic of religious significance to analyze in light of course themes that we cover throughout the semester. You must confirm your topic with the professor prior to moving forward with your paper. You may select a topic of particular interest to you, or you may consult the professor about potential options that suit your interests or career path. Either way, you must confirm your choice with the professor. You will write a 5–7-page paper based primarily on the selected topic, and you will give significant emphasis to critical analysis based on the assigned readings, course lectures, and class discussions. The paper is due Saturday, December 8th and should be uploaded to the link on the course Moodle site by 12:00 noon on December 8. Late papers will be penalized 50 points for each day they are late, starting at noon on December 8.

Final Papers are worth 200 points. Papers will be graded according to the following criteria. An A term paper demonstrates not only a factual command of the material but also the ability to construct a coherent and complex argument-driven thesis that is supported by evidence and presented in clear and accurate prose. B grades will be assigned to term papers that possess both an identifiable thesis and adequate factual command, but that lack sufficient detail, or clarity and/or complexity in thinking or writing. Grades in the C range reflect papers that lack a thesis, or that provide minimal detail or evidence, or that exhibit significant writing problems. D grades will be assigned to papers that are clearly inadequate in content, organization, and writing. For a writing rubric, see:

<https://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/Teaching/CourseDesign/Assessment-Grading/Rubrics/PhilosophyPaperRubric.doc>.

**6) Final Exam, worth 200 points total.** You will take a final exam. It will include short-answer and essay components covering course readings, lectures, discussions, and other

assignments. You will have one hour to take the final exam on Saturday, December 15.

### **Grading Scale:**

Final numerical grades for the course will be assigned according to [OU's Grading System](#) (found here:

[http://catalog.oakland.edu/content.php?catoid=11&navoid=483#Grading\\_System](http://catalog.oakland.edu/content.php?catoid=11&navoid=483#Grading_System)): A (4.0) 930–1000; A- (3.7) 900–929; B+ (3.3) 870–899; B (3.0) 830–869; B- (2.7) 800–829; C+ (2.3) 770–799; C (2.0) 730–769; C- (1.7) 700–729; D+ (1.3) 670–699; D (1.0) 600–669; No credit (0.0) 0–599.

**Academic Conduct Policy:** Cheating on examinations, plagiarism, falsifying reports/records, and unauthorized collaboration, access, or modifying of computer programs are considered serious breaches of academic conduct. The Oakland University policy on academic conduct will be strictly followed with no exceptions. See catalog under Academic Policies and Procedures. See also, Obey the OU Conduct Code, in Expectations of Students section (no. 6) above.

**Adds/Drops:** The University add/drop policy will be explicitly followed. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the University deadline dates for dropping the course.

**Special Considerations:** Students with disabilities who may require special considerations should make an appointment with campus Disability Support Services. Students should also bring their needs to the attention of the instructor as soon as possible. See also, Register with Disability Support Services, in Expectations of Students section (no. 8) above.

**Time Schedule and Topical Outline:** The class schedule, below, indicates class dates, exam date, specific topical material to be covered, and reading/homework assignments. The instructor reserves the right to make minor adjustments to this schedule.

#### **Week 1, September 5–7: Starting Foundations**

*Introduction to course themes, requirements, and methodologies*

- McCutcheon, "What is the Academic Study of Religion?" (2 pp.)

Friday, September 7: Introduction forum post & responses due

- Submit 1–2 sentence definition of religion

#### **Week 2, September 10–14: What Is the Study of Religion?**

*The Role of the Scholar*

- McCutcheon, "What is the Study of Religion?" (pp. 1–6)
- McCutcheon, "What's in a Name?" (pp. 7–14)

Wednesday, September 12: Reading Reflections due

Friday, September 14: Reading Responses due; assignment due

#### **Week 3, September 17–21: What Is Religion?**

*Historiography; Comparative*

- Prothero, *God Is Not One*, Introduction (pp. 1–26)

Wednesday, September 19: Reading Reflections due

Friday, September 21: Reading Responses due; Reflective Journal due

**Week 4, September 24–28**

*Way of Submission*

- Prothero, *God Is Not One*, “Islam” (pp. 15–44)
- Sophia Rose Arjana, “Monstrous Muslims”

Wednesday, September 26: Reading Reflections due

Friday, September 28: Reading Responses due; Comic due

**Week 5, October 1–5**

*Way of Salvation*

- Prothero, *God Is Not One*, “Christianity” (pp. 65–99)

Wednesday, October 3: Reading Reflections due

Friday, October 5: Reading Responses due; Comic due

**Week 6, October 8–12**

*Way of Propriety*

- Prothero, *God Is Not One*, “Confucianism” (pp. 101–130)

Wednesday, October 10: Reading Reflections due

Friday, October 12: Reading Responses due; Comic due

**Week 7, October 15–19**

*Way of Devotion*

- Prothero, *God Is Not One*, “Hinduism” (pp. 131–168)
- Sanjay’s Super Team (7 min)

Wednesday, October 17: Reading Reflections due

Friday, October 19: Reading Responses due; Comic due

**Week 8, October 22–26**

*Way of Awakening*

- Prothero, *God Is Not One*, “Buddhism” (pp. 169–201)

Wednesday, October 24: Reading Reflection due

Friday, October 26: Reading Responses due; Comic due

**Week 9, October 29–November 2**

*Way of Connection*

- Prothero, *God Is Not One*, “Yoruba” (pp. 203–241)

Wednesday, October 31: Reading Reflection due

Friday, November 2: Reading Responses due; Comic due

**Week 10, November 5–9**

*Way of Exile and Return*

- Prothero, *God Is Not One*, “Judaism” (pp. 243–278)



Wednesday, November 7: Reading Reflection due  
Friday, November 9: Reading Responses due; Comic due

**Week 11, November 12–16**

*Way of Flourishing*

- Prothero, *God Is Not One*, “Daoism” (pp. 279–315)

Wednesday, November 14: Reading Reflection due

Friday, November 16: Reading Responses due; Comic due

**Week 12, November 19–21: Assignments Due**

Wednesday, November 21: Reflective Journal due

Wednesday, November 21: Extra Credit assignments due

**Thanksgiving Recess: November 22–23**

**Week 13, November 26–30**

*Way of Skepticism*

- Prothero, *God Is Not One*, “Atheism” (pp. 317–329)
- Supplemental reading assignment

Wednesday, November 28: Reading Reflection due

Friday, November 30: Reading Responses due; Comic due; Reflective Journal due

**Week 14, December 3–7**

*Substantivism; Essentialism*

- McCutcheon, “Essentials of Religion” & “Fundamentals of Religion”
- Armstrong, “Gold Rule”
- Film: *Gandhi*

Wednesday, December 5: Reading Reflection due

Friday, December 7: Reading Responses due

Assignment due

Saturday, December 8: Final Term Paper due

**Final Exam: Saturday, December 15**